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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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All three major newspapers (Ha'aretz, Yediot, and Maariv) led with various aspects of the disengagement move. Ha'aretz reported that the latest, tentative version of the withdrawal blueprint says that three northern Gaza Strip settlements -- Elei Sinai, Dugit, and Nissanit -- will be the first to be evacuated by the army and police in the implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan. The isolated settlement of Netzarim is also apparently due for evacuation in the first week of the withdrawal, in late July. Yediot reported that Disengagement Administration Director Yonatan Bassi has asked PM Sharon to postpone the evacuation by three weeks, in order not to upset the sensitive period of mourning set in the Jewish calendar over the destruction of the two Jerusalem temples. Maariv reported that many residents of two northern West Bank settlements that are not included in the disengagement plan -- Hermesh and Mevo Dotan -- have asked the IDF to evacuate them as well. On Sunday, Ha'aretz bannered the cancellation by the leaders of the Katif Bloc settlers on Saturday of a meeting scheduled for Sunday with Sharon. The newspaper wrote that hard-liners want to keep up the appearance of fighting against the disengagement from the Gaza Strip. On Sunday, Maariv reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decided on Thursday to collect most of the weapons belonging to the settlers slated for evacuation, but that Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra opposes the initiative, saying that the settlers must deal with the matter themselves.

Leading media quoted Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom at saying Sunday at pre-Passover holiday meetings that there will be no further disengagement.

On Sunday, leading media reported that Israel and the PA are renewing talks this week over issues of mutual interest regarding the transfer of cities to the PA, the release of prisoners, and security matters. Hatzofe quoted PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as saying Sunday following talks he held with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that the PA is prepared to coordinate the disengagement move with Israel. On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that the Bush administration's envoys Elliott Abrams and David Welch will be arriving in the region on Tuesday to assess Abbas's political status and find ways to shore up his regime. On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted Israeli sources as saying during the weekend, following Sharon's U.S. visit, that Israel and the U.S. see eye-to-eye on an evaluation of Iran's nuclear plans, but that they divided on the question of when and how to bring the issue before the UN Security Council.

All media cited a Shin Bet announcement Sunday that three members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine from north and east Jerusalem were recently arrested on suspicion of planning to assassinate Shas spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

Ha'aretz quoted Yohanan Tsoref, a terrorism expert at the Interdisciplinary Center and a former consultant on Arab affairs for the GOI's Civil Administration in the territories, as saying that the release of prisoners is the best way for Abbas to distinguish himself from

Yasser Arafat. Yediot cited Sunday's cabinet announcement that Israel will release nine Jordanian security prisoners.

Leading media reported that in the third incident of its kind in recent weeks, Fatah gunmen stormed the offices of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Jenin on Thursday, accusing the PA of failing to pay the families of security prisoners in Israel. On Sunday, Jerusalem Post quoted Palestinian legislator Abdel Fattah Hamayel as saying during the weekend that members of the armed wing of Hamas, Izzadin Qassam, have expressed their readiness to join the PA's security forces. Israel Radio cited a denial by Hamas.

On Sunday, Maariv reported that a giant rally against disengagement will take place in New York's Central Park in June, from which a large delegation of thousands of American Jews will travel to the Katif Bloc for a "mission of solidarity" with the residents.

On Sunday, in a report from Cairo, Jerusalem Post cited the confidence of Egyptian reformers that their cause is gaining momentum.

Maariv reported that the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) is terminating its activities after 30 years. The group says it is protesting the GOI's opposition to promoting the issue of compensation of Jews from Arab countries and North Africa.

Ha'aretz cited a poll conducted by the U.S. Jewish organization Ameinu that found that most American Jews support the disengagement plan, in spite of doubts about whether it will make Israel safer. The telephone survey found that 62 percent of respondents backed the plan, while 23 percent opposed it.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Somebody here has understood that we will not be able to rest on our laurels on the day after disengagement. The Americans will not let us."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "It is difficult to believe that Sharon does not know that the cease-fire with Hamas and integrating that organization into the political process is considered one of Abu Mazen's most important achievements."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced last week the appointment of James Wolfensohn as the special envoy for Gaza disengagement.... From now on, the Bush administration and its partners have two tools at their disposal to improve the odds of the evacuation's success."

Ron Breiman, chair of the right-wing organization Professors For a Strong Israel, wrote in Ha'aretz: "If Bush were to understand, rather than being taken in by Sharon's charm or European pressure, he would not waste his second term on a problem that has no solution in the foreseeable future."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is strange and disturbing ... that the lack of Palestinian press freedom not only fails to top the Western agenda for democratic reform, but seems somewhere off the radar screen."

Block Quotes:  
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**I.** "The Real Message"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 18): "Israel [believed] that after disengagement, [it] would be able to take some 'time out' and enter a prolonged interim stage before the negotiations on a permanent settlement are resumed. However, these basic premises of Sharon proved to be wrong, one after the other, at his meetings with President Bush. The Americans do not intend to send the Middle East on a two-year vacation. It is even doubtful whether they will even allow us a break of a few months after disengagement is completed in

September.... [The Americans] place much less emphasis on total dismantling of the terrorism infrastructure as a condition for continued progress in the road map. We will not receive a pat on the shoulder on the morning after disengagement.... Shortly after disengagement Israel will find itself subjected to a concentrated American effort, coordinated as never before with the Europeans, to open a corridor to the permanent-status agreement.... The two American representatives for coordination of activity in the region, General Ward and James Wolfensohn, will be much more creative and dominant. The report published by Yediot Aharonot that the second stage of the disengagement is already on the agenda at the Prime Minister's Office, shows that the American message has been heard, after all, by Israeli ears. And that somebody here has understood that we will not be able to rest on our laurels on the day after disengagement. The Americans will not let us. This, in effect, was the main message that Israel was intended to absorb from the successful and so prestigious visit of the Prime Minister to the U.S. President's private ranch in Texas."

## II. "There's No Partner"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (April 18): "It is difficult to decide what is worse -- that the Prime Minister is unaware that every delay in fulfilling ... promises further weakens Abu Mazen and strengthens opponents of any compromise, or that he is aware of the bad influence of Israeli policies on Abu Mazen's situation, but finds it more convenient to have a weak Palestinian leader. It is difficult to believe that Sharon does not know that the cease-fire with Hamas and integrating that organization into the political process is considered one of Abu Mazen's most important achievements. Strange. A politician who is afraid to evacuate dozens of outposts inhabited by lawbreakers and needs the opposition's help to survive is considered a strong leader. A politician ready to sign a peace agreement between two states is considered a weak leader. The important thing is that there's no partner."

## III. "Coordinate the Evacuation"

Ha'aretz editorialized (April 17): "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced last week the appointment of James Wolfensohn as the special envoy for Gaza disengagement. Wolfensohn, an investment banker, will end a decade as head of the World Bank in about six weeks. He is to stay at his new post until the end of the year and has been given a two-fold task: to coordinate the civilian aspects of the handover of Gaza and the northern West Bank from Israel to the Palestinian Authority, and to jump-start the Palestinian economy after the evacuation. Wolfensohn's appointment expropriates the evacuation from the sole province of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, where it was purported to be a unilateral issue, and transforms it into a multilateral one, overseen by the international community. Wolfensohn, an American citizen, is first and foremost the representative of President George W. Bush and Rice. But the three other members of the Quartet -- the UN, the EU, and Russia -- were also party to it. Thus, Wolfensohn's activity is linked to the road map, as is the disengagement itself. It allows those who sent him to determine which of the parties -- the Israelis or the Palestinians -- has met its obligations, according to this plan, after evacuation. Wolfensohn has also been authorized to strengthen the ties between the two sides, to make it difficult for them to refuse to fulfill those obligations. From now on, the Bush administration and its partners have two tools at their disposal to improve the odds of the evacuation's success. On the security side, General William Ward is urging the chairman of the PA to streamline the clumsy and debilitated security forces that are supposed to answer to him. On the civilian side, Wolfensohn will try to serve as a shock absorber, so that the transfer of Gaza leaves the PA with an asset instead of a burden."

## IV. "What Bush Doesn't Understand"

Ron Breiman, chair of the right-wing organization Professors For a Strong Israel, wrote in Ha'aretz (April 18): "If Bush were to understand that building a vision on the shaky foundation of expelling Jews and encouraging terror does not agree with his positive desire for democratizing the world and overcoming terror, he himself would turn to different channels. He wouldn't waste his time on unifying Abu Mazen's security services, which are nothing more than terrorists in uniform, but would demand their total

removal from the western part of the Land of Israel [i.e. Israel, including the territories]; he wouldn't demand gestures from Sharon to establish the rule of Arafat's successor, in other words, a continuation of the approach of the Oslo Accords, which collapsed in a foreseeable manner, but would demand the total abolition of the PA... [Bush's] concern for Arab territorial contiguity means a lethal lopping off of Jewish territorial contiguity, and an existential threat to the only state the Jews have; he would understand that the attempt to bring about peace now is leading to 'war now'.... To sum up, if Bush were to understand, rather than being taken in by Sharon's charm or European pressure, he would not waste his second term on a problem that has no solution in the foreseeable future; he would exhibit the responsibility that the Prime Minister of Israel has lost, and stop Sharon on the eve of implementation of the act of madness that contradicts the values of Zionism, Judaism, democracy and the need for a global war against terror."

#### IV. "Free the Palestinian Press"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 17): "A glimpse of the reality beneath the veneer of democratization in the Palestinian Authority was offered a few days ago in this newspaper in a troubling account ... on the plight of journalists next door to us. The situation ... depicted, and to which many courageous reporters attested, belies the impression that the Palestinian leadership is internalizing the values of a free society.... As we reported, the picture is hardly one of progress. Indeed, the PA recently decided to subordinate all government-controlled media to the direct supervision of the Ministry of Information. In a move widely regarded as a tightening of the authorities' grip on both the print and electronic media, these are now to be subjected to intensive review by the newly established 'Executive Media Council'.... Though some argue that a free press will be exploited by hate-mongers of the Hamas ilk, we should remember that the PA's government-controlled press continues to refer to suicide bombers as 'martyrs,' even though Mahmoud Abbas has presumably committed to ending incitement. Without a free press, there is simply no hope for more moderate views to come to the fore.... It is strange and disturbing, therefore, that the lack of Palestinian press freedom not only fails to top the Western agenda for democratic reform, but seems somewhere off the radar screen.... Given the centrality of press freedom as a pillar of democracy, and that the United States, and even Europe, have put political reform at the center of their vision for Israeli-Palestinian peace, the almost complete lack of attention to this problem is a glaring anomaly. Without independent newspapers and free Palestinian journalists, hopes for a better future for Palestinians and Israelis will be slim."

KURTZER